

Golf in the Corporate World

BY BRIDGET FALBO

Rush Creek GC in Maple Grove, Minn., is nestled in a Minneapolis suburb, a 30-minute drive from the corporate headquarters of hotel giant Carlson Cos. and equipment manufacturer Toro Co., as well as other large companies. It's no wonder that the golf course focuses its energies on landing corporate clients to host events there. In fact, the course recently added meeting rooms and a ballroom to the Scottish-style clubhouse to highlight its focus on business-oriented events.

Superintendent Greg Christian understands the course's mission and how it affects his duties. Since the course must continually impress new clients who have never been to the course, Christian is always on marketing duty.



Whether it's double-cutting the greens for a corporate tournament, setting up catering equipment for a group event or directing

"We can do 99 percent of the job correctly, but it only takes a small blunder for a customer not to come back."

—GREG CHRISTIAN



The course, including the 6th hole, must always look its best for corporate events.

puzzled-looking visitors to the clubhouse, he's providing personalized customer service in the hope that the same corporate events will be booked again next year. Christian is also hoping his efforts will help the course snag new corporate clients by impressing visiting golfers who work for other companies.

"We often don't get a second chance to impress corporate clients," Christian says. "We can do 99 percent of the job correctly, but it only takes a small blunder for a customer not to come back. While small mistakes might be OK at a country club where you have a built-in clientele, it's not acceptable here."

Customer service is the main marketing tool for the 4-year-old club, says Jenny Trendera, golf event coordinator. The course has a Web site and a

marketing packet to send to potential clients, but what sells it is extraordinary service.

"We run corporate events [the way] clients want," Trendera says. "We do everything we possibly can to make it the best [for them]."

Although corporate events only amount to 25 percent of play, there are such events held at least three days a week throughout the season from May to October. It's those events that make the most money for the course, Christian acknowledges.

But the course is also public, and Christian says his greatest challenge is managing public traffic so the course is in ideal shape for corporate events and tournaments. While all tournaments — with the challenges of accommodating spectators, corporate pavilions and the ever-present television crews — provide maintenance headaches, they also provide proven

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Money Shot

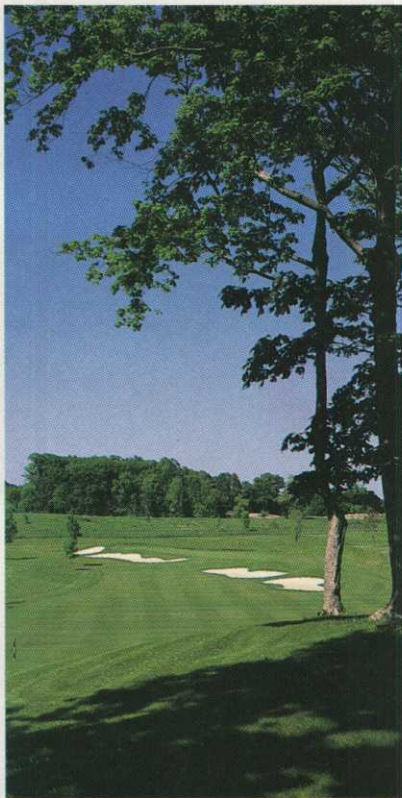
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marketing tools for the course. In that spirit, Christian welcomes those challenges.

In fact, when Michael Jordan played in a charity event at the club last year, he drew plenty of onlookers, which eventually turned into more corporate business, Trenda says. The idea is to get corporations thinking that if the course is good enough for Michael Jordan, it's good enough for them, she adds.

The concentration on marketing to corporate clients often conflicts with renovation and new building projects, since the course must always be at its best. That's why good communication between the executive management and course maintenance department is crucial.

The course is booked throughout the season, so when maintenance has to rebuild tees or redesign bunkers, it



Management support is a must if course maintenance will be used as a marketing tool.

has to fit into a schedule that inconveniences as few customers as possible, Christian says.

Christian appreciates the support he receives from course management when he asks for extra help to achieve its goals. But he says it's simply not an ask-and-you-shall-receive policy.

"Before the support is the challenge — 'Can you get this done with what you have?' " Christian says. "If you have a dependable crew, good relations with management and an understanding of how to put the course and yourself on stage to serve customers, marketing corporate events becomes just another facet of a superintendent's job." ■

Falbo is a free-lance writer who lives in Albertsville, Minn.

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